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Honey, I blew up the bike

Can Islabikes recreate the detail it puts into its children's cycles on a full-size adult machine?

Words Matt Lamy Photos Roo Fowler



We admit we like Islabikes in this office, and it's not just because a lot of us have children. Anybody with any kind of engineering appreciation can't help but be impressed by the company's ability to provide shrunken-down 'real bikes' to young cyclists. Now, though, Isla has decided to make a real 'real' bike — one that mums and dads can ride — the Beinn 29.

The Beinn name was already a fixed part of Islabikes' line-up, with models ranging from a 20in-wheeler version suitable for five-year-olds, to a 26in-wheeler for those over 11. The Beinn 29 fits perfectly into the existing format: it's a standard-shaped hybrid, built from lightweight aluminium, with a set of wide riser bars handling controls.

Attention to detail

This being Islabikes, though, there is no shortage of tweaks and detailing, all of which are designed to add potential to the bike's abilities. Rack-mount bosses can be found both at the back and on the cro-mo forks; there are disc-brake mounts at each end too, and the rear dropout is even adjustable, to accommodate a single-speed or hub gear. The Beinn is beautifully finished — as a complete package, it puts similar machines from more mainstream British brands to shame — and, at 12kg, getting it on the roof rack won't cause a rupture.

Although it's not a heavy bike, on the road, the Beinn 29 feels supremely stable. It's got a nice, active feel, and despite being designed as a bike to use for pottering along with the kids, it's actually rather sprightly — which will be handy when it comes to rescuing little Jimmy as he disappears into a

bush/stream/herd of farm animals. On asphalt, the Kenda Kwick Trax tyres offer a nice mix of grip and efficiency — you certainly don't feel like you're pedalling through treacle as you do with fatter rubber.

Islabikes' philosophy has always been based around making it as easy as possible for riders to actually ride. To that end, the Beinn 29's SRAM drivetrain is simple genius. Gearing choice in the hybrid/commuter market is thought of as a straight battle between derailleur-based systems, which need some maintenance but come with a wide range of speeds, or super-efficient but relatively expensive hub gears with fewer ratios.

Islabikes has opted for something of a middle way, combining a single ring at the front with an eight-speed, wide-ratio block at the back. So there is a rear derailleur that will need some looking after, but the system is reassuringly simple and works very well. The broad range of cogs copes with most situations, and the single GripShift control couldn't be simpler.

Riser reservations

Stopping power comes courtesy of a set of Tektro V-brakes, which work perfectly well. And the rest of the spec is equally efficient: the Islabikes-branded wheels are smart items and roll smoothly, and the Islabikes saddle is a nice compromise between comfort (favoured by new riders) and sleekness (expected by more experienced cyclists). The one small reservation we have is the riser bar, which seems just a tad too wide.

In fact, so good is the Beinn 29, the only slight problem new riders might experience is too much confidence. Impressed by its stability and agility

Weight 12kg (26.4lb)
Frame sizes 16, 18, 20in
Colour White
Frame 7005 T6 aluminium
Fork Chromoly
Gears SRAM X4
Wheels Islabikes-branded aluminium rims and hubs
Handlebar Islabike-branded aluminium riser bar
Brakes Tektro V-brakes
Saddle Islabikes unisex
Tyres Kenda Kwick Trax
Price £399.99

we couldn't help ourselves and had to give it a blast off-road. As had to be expected, the excellent Kwick Trax tyres aren't designed for muck and mayhem. It's no problem; should you want more grip, mountain bike tyres up to two-inch will fit in the frame.

We may have bitten off more than we could chew, but that's the beauty of Islabikes — they are designed to make their riders feel capable of taking on the world. Better still, they go a long way to allowing their owners to achieve just that. It might be designed for bigger boys and girls, but the Beinn 29 is no less fun.



Twist-grip shifting is suitably simple



Wheels are Islabikes' own equipment

MEET THE MAKER

The Isla behind Islabikes

The Isla behind Islabikes is Isla Rowntree, former three-time national cyclo-cross champion.

"I used to do some custom frame-building, particularly for women. I made cyclo-cross bikes, custom track frames.

"Then my friends and acquaintances were getting to an age when they were having children. I was always getting asked: 'What bikes shall we get for our kids?' and I felt a lot of the bikes out there were really of very poor quality. I just thought so many of them were so heavy. Why should they be heavier than my bikes when the child is only four years old? That alerted me to the gap in the market."



Single-ring simplicity at the front



Kenda tyres are happiest on the road

ALTERNATIVE

ANOTHER BRITISH BEAUTY **Ridgeback Velocity £399.99**

When it comes to hybrids and sensibly designed flat-bar bikes, British brand Ridgeback has one of the best ranges around. Like the Beinn, the Velocity comes with an aluminium frame and cro-mo forks, but while Islabikes has fitted a decent if limited eight-speed drivetrain, the Ridgeback is specced with a slightly lower-rent but wide-ranging 24-speed Shimano Acera system. You pay yer money and takes yer choice.

